Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

SUMMER 2002 VOL. 10, NO. 2

BACKGROUND OF PALM DESERT
by Clifford W. Henderson (date unknown)

I came to the desert in 1945 after being released from Walter Reed Hospital. Because I had contracted a desert fever while in service in North Africa, I was advised to recuperate in a warm, dry climate. While I stayed at Edgar Bergen's ranch on the north side of Portola, I fell in love with the area and purchased 17 parcels of land.

7-1945	Water located at 612 feet by driller, Roscoe Moss.
1946	First community constructions began.
1946	Overall planner for community was Land Planning Consultant, Tommy Tomson, A.S.L.A.
11-16/17-46	Property first offered for sale. Sold over quarter million in two weeks.
7-18-1947	Dedication of first post office with postmaster, Bill Meyers.
1947	Firecliff Lodge opened.
12-20-1948	Shadow Mountain Club opened.
1948	Palm Desert Rotary Club started with approximately 10 members.
1949	Palm Desert Community Church opened with minister, Rev. John Robertson McCarney.
1949	Palm Desert School opened in the Fall with enrollment of nearly 200.
1949	Shadow Mountain Stables completed.
By 3-1953	The following had been accomplished: * 30 miles of completed roads * 159 completed homes * 35 Sun Lodges ranging in price from $10,000 to $14,000 * 24 homes under construction, one-fourth with private pools * Palm Desert had 14 bungalow hotels: Firecliff Lodge, Desert Villa Lodge, Esquire, Green Palm Lodge, House of Riley, Larrea Lodge, Palm Desert Adobe, Mountain Terrace, Sun and Shadow, Shepard's Apartments, Tropical Gardens, and Twin Palms. This represented investments of over $3,500,000.
10-17-1958	Dedicated second post office.
1967-68	Cliff Henderson was Honorary Mayor of Palm Desert.

In the beginning, El Paseo was designed and planned to become one of the greatest fashionable avenues in the world - comparable to none. It has fulfilled Cliff's dream. It now has 122 shops of every type and description, and it is still growing.

Pioneers Tell Their Stories

(Taken for Hal Kapp's file - date unknown)

CATHEDRAL CITY (by Robert Hillary): Yes, it was George Allen, my mother's oldest brother, who had a real estate office across the street from the Desert Inn in Palm Springs. Uncle George made the acquaintance of two men from San Francisco, Mr. Van Fleet and Glen Plumley. They had more money to invest than he wanted. When he heard that the Southern Pacific was selling sections of their land, he asked them if they would like to take one half of a section and he would take the other half. He took Sun Air with a school teacher and bought it for $8000. Van Fleet and Plumley took the other half section and developed it as Cathedral City. Uncle George named it Cathedral City. He said there was a canyon with a palm tree in it that had been named Cathedral City; and he thought it should be called Cathedral City.

My uncle lived in a little tent on his property, which was across from the what is now the outdoor movie. He built the first little office in Cathedral City at Cathedral Canyon and what he called Broadway, but what is now Highway 111. Out in his yard he had a fountain that was made out of an umbrella that he cemented over the top, and instead of the handle -- a pipe, and the water came down over the top of the umbrella. That was there when we came in 1926. Also, there was an archway which we heard was built at a cost of $300 which was collected from the local residents. They were very perturbed when it was torn down to widen the highway.

George and Louella Hillary were the father and mother of Cathedral City. They were the gayest couple you ever saw. He'd wear a great big chef's hat and fry pancakes for breakfast. He would play the "Arkansas Traveler" on his violin and recite it. A great wag and very deaf, he wouldn't wear a hearing aid because he said he heard too much anyway. During the time of the gold rush, he had been one of the early pioneers in Skagway.

VOLUNTEERS

by Jean Ernst - Chairperson

In January and March information/training sessions were held for those interested in being docents and learning about the other activities involved in the operation of the Historical Society. At the first meeting Dan Callahan demonstrated his inimitable docent talk to museum visitors. Caring for donated items was also discussed.

At the second meeting Ed and Adele Ruxton described the procedure used during the Mini-Muster fire safety program each October. Ginny Folkers introduced everyone to the paper and photo archives, methods of filing and finding information. Society archives go back as far as possible and extend up to the present.

Others who attended were: Doris Ortega, Carol Scanny, Helene Harrison, Mary Helen Kelly, Julia Haas, Laura McCandless, Lois Bradstreet, Bud Lesser, Hal Rover, Virginia Stevens, Joyce White, Jan Holmlund, Ginny Mullins and Helen Oliver.

Try to attend the next meeting on Wednesday, June 26 at 10:30 a.m. We hope to have the volunteer/docent program polished and operating in the Fall.

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Don Olesen **In Memoriam** Mildred Beatty
Theda Simpson Lundquist Del Sharbutt

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DEL SHARBUTT

(from an interview by V. Folkers done in April 2000)

DEL SHARBUTT was born in Texas in 1912, where his father was a Methodist minister. He attended Texas Christian University. In order to help pay his way through college he played the saxophone and the clarinet at dances. After graduation he planned to be a hot shot lawyer, and then to become governor of Texas.

His career plans got side-tracked while working at a local radio station. Beginning in 1934 he wound up with CBS Radio Network in New York City. It was the start of the "Big Band Era," and Del announced for Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and many more. He lived right on "Swing Street," 52nd Street in mid-town New York City. That's where all the jazz joints were. He married a girl singer and they had three kids.

Del announced many popular shows on the network, like "Your Hit Parade" with Frank Sinatra. Also, he wrote many songs, including theme songs. He held a membership in the American Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers since 1953. With his memorable deep voice, he announced for Bob Hope's first radio comedy show. Later Sharbutt became the voice of all Campbell Soup advertising, and created the advertising phrase "Mmmm, mmmmm, good!" While working exclusively for the Campbell Soup Company, he moved to Hollywood. There he did many shows, including the "Amos 'n Andy" show.

When he retired in 1976 Del and his wife, Meri Bell, moved to Palm Desert. Involvement in developing a valley-wide educational program on alcoholism and other drug addictions in affiliation with Eisenhower Medical Center had been a priority in Del's life. In 1977 he helped Mrs. Ford develop the "Betty Ford Center." Activity in these two efforts continued until his death.

It was also in 1977 that he joined his wonderful Palm Desert Rotary Club. In Del's own words, "I try to live by the rules of the Rotary philosophy 'Service above Self'.....as a real way of life.....'a day at a time.'"

Note: Besides having "Celebrity" status in the Society's archives, Del Sharbutt was an unusually thoughtful and caring man. If you were fortunate enough to be on his list of friends, you undoubtedly received a musical greeting card for a birthday, anniversary, or other occasion. A very special person ..... he will be missed by many in Palm Desert.

Theda Simpson Lundquist

A special exhibit is on display at the historic fire house honoring the memory of our beloved Theda. If you haven't seen it, please stop by on Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. during the month of June. Some of the memorabilia has been donated to the society, and some items have been loaned to us by Millie Bird.

FIRE HOUSE YARD SALE

Saturday, October 26

The Society's second annual yard sale is being planned for this Fall. If it is to be a success, we must start collecting saleable items NOW. Clean out that closet, garage or extra room where unused items seem to collect. Remember.....one man's trash is another man's treasure!! The Society is a 501(c)3 charitable origanization, and we will issue receipts for your income tax deductions upon request. While you are sorting, watch for historical items for our archives. We want everything except clothes and shoes. These can be dropped off during June or call 346-6588 for pick-up. During July and August, when the office will be closed, call Ginny at 340-0828 or Hal at 346-1967.

Note: Did you donate some Erropean collector's plates with certificates to last year's yard sale? If you are that generous person, please call Ginny at 340-0828.

ED MULLINS ANNUAL PICNIC

This event, held on March 3 in Civic Center Park, was chaired by Dan and BJ Callahan. Our sincere thanks to them, the phone callers, and all who worked the day of the picnic. We had a delightful time! Thanks also to Jean Ernst and Hal Rover who issued invitations to our special guests this year – retired and present members of the C.O.D. staff:

John Marmon, Brett Romero,
Edgar DeForest, Harold Bird,
Joe Iantorno, Buford Crites,
Jean Waggoner, Marty McKell,
Millie Bird (Friends of theLibrary),

The whole affair was topped off with a hilariously funny raffle conducted by our in-house comedian, Dan Callahan. Super-winner, Buford Crites, added to the comedy. If you missed this year, don't let anything keep you away in 2003.

FOUNDER'S DAY

chaired by Lois Bradstreet

Conducted for the first time in the Conference Room of the Palm Desert Public Library, this May 15 event was very special for all who attended. Thanks to Jean Ernst for nominating our honoree this year – **KEN ROBERTS**. A resident of Palm Desert as a youngster, Ken attended Palm Desert School and was in the Cub & Boy Scouts. After marrying Jeni, two daughters came along, ushering him into both troop and council levels of the Girl Scouts. After college and the USAF, he served on the city's Planning Commission and worked in the development of the Living Desert in the early 1990s. A long-time member of Rotary, he has held positions at local and district levels. He is the owner of Roberts Construction Company.

Past recipients of the award were recognized. Then Mayor Richard Kelly presented the 2002 Founder's Day plaque to "Mr. Rotary." He also regaled the audience with humorous tales of the time when both Rotary clubs conducted bingo games as a fund raisers.

Ken gave a wonderful talk about what it was like growing up in the undeveloped, young Palm Desert. Gene Roberts, his father, was also a pioneer of the area who built the Sun Lodges. Ken's life is a record of service to the community. Congratulations, Ken. Thank you for accepting our invitation to be the 2002 honoree.

Thanks to Lois and all her helpers. Also to the homemade goodie bakers, and to Tony Dalugdug of Hometown Buffet for donating a huge tray of cookies.

BY – LAWS REVISIONS

chaired by Joyce White

You will hear more about this project in the Fall issue of the Hourglass.

NEW MEMBERS

Arthur & Mrs. Montoya - Contributing
Ken Roberts Construction - Business
Mr. & Mrs. Donald McMeekin
Peggy Brigandi
Irene A. Colangelo
A. Marie Ford

Life Membership Given to Helen Dengler

for her generosity to the Society in allowing us to keep all the profits we make from selling her recent book about the White Sun Guest Ranch.

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This wonderful story is available for sale at the Society office.

DONATIONS

Frankie Abel - items from P.D. Women's Club & Cross on the Hill
Fenrick Wells - Erawan Gardens menus
Genevieve Burke -76 archival items and 58 Flood photos
Dick Hartley - 2 Pioneer items for Harry Oliver and Steve Ragsdale
Paula McCreadie - 25 memorabilia & news items, 14 Flood photos
Evonne Henderson Riddell - 7 items for Cyria & Randall's files
Art Montoya - 3 items and 17 photos related to the Portola Post Office
Ken Roberts - 5 items and 28 copies of photos re his life in Palm Desert
Mary Safe - 180 articles for our archival collections
Jean Hollenbeck, Dan Callahan, and Hal Rover contribute items for the archives on a regular basis.

HELEN OLIVER RESIGNS

We are sad to say that our faithful secretary has resigned to take a position in her son's office. Helen's specialty was accounting. She will certainly be missed, but we'll see her at luncheons and events.

COMPUTERIZING THE ARCHIVES

We are now the owners of a Gateway computer with XP Windows. The purchase of museum software, a printer and scanner are still to be made. Thanks to those who have acted as consultants in the purchase of this equipment:

- Doug Van Gelder - City of P.D.
- Jan Holmlund - Museum Consultant
- Harford Windsor - PDHS, retired

Plant a Garden This Season

First plant six rows of PEAS
Presence
Promptness
Preparation
Positivism
Preseverance
Prayer

Next plant four rows of SQUASH
Squash gossip
Squash criticism
Squash indifference
Squash negativism

Then five rows of LETTUCE
Lettuce be unselfish
Lettuce be true to our obligations
Lettuce obey our rules and policies
Lettuce be faithful in duty
Lettuce love one another

No garden is complete without TURNIPS
Turnip for meetings
Turnip with a smile
Turnip with new ideas
Turnip with determination to make everything count for something worthwhile this season.

- from American Legion Post 301 Newsletter, March 2002

Did you ever notice that anybody who is going slower than you is an idiot and anyone going faster is a maniac?

- Ann Landers

Life in the 1500's – The Origin of Popular Phrases

• People took their yearly bath in May, so most people got married in June while they still smelled good. Brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide possible body odor.
• Baths equaled a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house was first to use it, then sons and other men, then women, and finally children. Babies were last, when the water was so dirty you could lose somebody in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."
• Houses had thatched roofs made of thick layers of straw with no wood underneath. It was the only place family pets, rodents and bugs could get warm. Rain made the roof slippery and the animals would fall off. Hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."
• Bugs and droppings would also fall inside the house. A sheet was attached to the top of a four-poster bed to keep the linens clean. This was the beginning of canopies on beds. and possibly the saying "Good night and don't let the bed bugs bite."
• The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying "dirt poor."
• The wealthy had slate floors which would get slippery in the winter when wet. They kept spreading more, to keep their footing as the season wore on. Soon it was slipping outside every time they opened the door. A piece of wood was placed at the entry way, hence a "thresh hold."

Have a wonderful summer !

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